Name of Scholar: Subhankar Ghosh Roy Choudhury

Supervisor: Professor Abhijit Sen

Title: Badal Sircar's Third Theatre :Understanding Performance Through Translation

Registration No. VB-1469 of 2012-13

Date of Registration: 10.05.2012 /10.05.2017

Synopsis

The Third Theatre – often marked as a significant theatrical form in the field of post-1950 alternative theatres in India, and claimed by Badal Sircar and his followers as an ideology rather than a form – made its first appearance to me in the form of plays written by Badal Sircar. Later, while reading the ideology and aesthetics of this theatre and watching some groups performing in this aesthetics, I came to know about the unique theatrical idiom that the Third Theatre bore. With time, it dawned upon me that a Third Theatre play-text, unlike a play-text written for the conventional proscenium stage, is not a self-contained, fully fleshed out 'readable'entity. Due to the specialized process of formation it undergoes – a collaborative process that is, which develops the literary text through workshops and trainings, without depending entirely on an author – even the understanding of the play-text demands an awareness of its theatricality and performability as well. The Third Theatre is never a case where a play is written keeping in mind its stageability. On the contrary, the formation of the literary text and the theatre text are often simultaneous processes here. Just as a page or two of a rough script initiates the workshops and rehearsals on its performance, the stage (though the Third Theatre does not concern itself with a stage per se) or the performance, too, develops the rest of the play in accordance with its demands.

Pursuing my research on Badal Sircar's theatre, I, however, had the opportunity to come across his writings on his theatre, his interviews and published experiences of his fellow workers(most of which are in Bengali) to eventually come to terms with the fact that a literal reading of any of his Third Theatre play is vastly different from a theatrical reading of the same, and that it is absolutely essential to rope in the aspects of performative issues and textual constitution for my understanding of Sircar's theatre through his plays. But a few questions kept coming to my mind when I tried to view some of Sircar's noted Third Theatre plays from the perspective of a wider, non-Bengali readership. What about the readers who are not familiar with the theatricality of Sircar's Third Theatre? How will they get to know the unique idiom that the play-texts belonging to the Third Theatre nurture? As many as seven plays from this phase of Sircar have been translated into English, keeping in mind their relevance and significance to a wider readership. But his theoretical writings, apart from *The Third Theatre* and a few interviews are mostly in Bengali, and therefore, the lack of their availability in English is certainly an impediment to one's understanding of the theatricality of the Third Theatre in terms of the plays. Also, in any case, not many readers would go in for a deeper reading of his theoretical premises and philosophy before reading his plays. Most of the readers would prefer reading only the plays and take what it easily offers to them. The existing translations of Sircar, as it appeared to me,

did not offer much in the field of performative reading of the texts. Should then the understanding of the texts by the non-Bengali readers, unaware of Sircar's theatre, remain partial an incomplete, suggesting in translation only what the scripted presence has said, and not probing into the unscripted, 'absent' possibilities of performances for a fuller understanding? All these questions formed the basis upon which I located my thesis question.

Sircar's Third Theatre differed from the other alternative theatres primarily on ideological grounds. Alternative theatrical practices in India rooted their alternative nature in their content, ideology and structure – in as many ways as possible; and though one school of practice would overlap with another ideologically or in their mode of expression, they tried to follow their distinct regional culture and tradition in their presentations of local as well as wider human concerns. Following the diverse nature of production and expression that has dominated these theatres since 1947, it may well be assumed that the rubric of alternative theatres thrives in its churning out multiple voices, each of them unique in its belonging to a root. However, there is one thing in common that these theatres shared – they all took up a revivalist approach, a strong reaction against the domination of a western theatricality which was a colonial import, and going back to the indigenous cultures to modernize themselves. Some did that in their experiments with the theatrical structure and form, some in the incorporation regional performance traditions to their productions, some in their content and ideology, and as it has been mentioned earlier already, one would influence the other and the compartments of implementation would eventually not remain distinct and exclusive.

Amidst this framework which was prepared mostly by city-based, educated theatre personalities who tried to revive nativism in theatre, we locate Badal Sircar's Third Theatre. Badal Sircar's own stance in his theatre does not get clarified by this positioning, however, and that is because of the name he chose for his endeavours – the Third Theatre. As we delve further into Sircar's theatre and its idiom, one thing deserves to be set straight at the very onset: there is no one definition of the Third Theatre that Sircar has given, or can be reached through our reading. From 1972 to 2011, under the larger rubric of the Third Theatre, there are many names which Sircar has played with, and his critics have associated with his practice. However, his initial idea of finding a new form of theatrical expression by forming a theatre of synthesis – loosely connecting the First (folk) Theatre and Second (urban) Theatre, and thereby assimilating them into a Third Theatre – did not last long. As he gradually matured in his theatrical vision, Sircar took up many performance spaces and styles to suit his theatre and its content, but remained firm throughout in his ideology where we can locate the thirdness of his theatre. Going back to the oeuvre of the alternative theatres to which Sircar's theatre primarily belong in its position and practice, one might decipher that these theatre claim their alternative status on two grounds: ideological – that they are, in their worldview, different from the practitioners who present their works under the head of mainstream, urban theatre; and aesthetic – that in their execution of their content, they mark a new approach to the use of performance codes and space other than the conventional ones. On the basis of these two grounds that alternative theatres generally hold, if we judge the 'thirdness' of Sircar's theatre, at one level, it seems Sircar was more certain about what he was not than what he really was. For all these years, he lived in constant anxiety of being tagged as some rigid, permanent structure, and to not be that, Sircar's approach towards defining his theatre has been that of negation. In his quest to find his own theatrical language, Sircar defiantly came out of the mainstream, popular proscenium stage. But neither did he seek a position in the broader paradigm of these canonized alternative theatrical

practices in India. His is an alternative theatre too, but something that is essentially elusive – not only eluding the mainstream but also the alternative canons. It is the *third* kind of theatre that lives as an anti-canon, reactionary force, a non-conformist practice that is perpetually in the state of becoming, the post-structuralist subject that refuses to fit into any one structure. The 'thirdness' of the Third Theatre perhaps is in its in-betweenness.

Aesthetically, however, the Third Theatre followed another kind of in-betweenness, which marks my second point of approach. Broadly, it subscribed to a theatre aesthetics that is hard to dissociate from the aesthetics of other alternative theatrical practices which it ideologically challenged. They are never scripted, but exist in the textual gaps as some absent presence which, if put in action, illumine the text. It is here that the theatrical language of the Third Theatre is remarkably different from other definitive languages. Its position of in-betweenness and association with both the scripted and the unscripted makes a particular text (in print or in performance) extremely fluid and flexible. Also, with the presence of no one author of the text, it opens itself up to a discursive plane, where changes, improvisations, suggestions and interpretations – all are part of the textuality of the theatre, and can be counted as contributions to the particular discourse of a text belonging to the Third Theatre. It was this unique nature of the theatre aesthetics that I thought was necessary to transpire to the readers who are unfamiliar to it, through the translated play-texts, for awareness lesser than this might enable one to read the play, but certainly would not help understanding its full implication.

The seven Third Theatre plays by Badal Sircar which were translated into English, in the form of books – two by Samik Bandyopadhyay, two by Suchandra Sarkar, two by Subhendu Sarkar, and one collaboratively by Badal Sircar and Kalyani Ghose – did not seem to reflect this awareness in their presentation. They were certainly successful as literal translations, and on linguistic paradigm, they did negotiate culturally. Samik Bandyopadhyay inserted end-notes to his translations and the one by Sircar and Ghose to address the regional specificities of the texts that transpired through the script; and Suchandra Sarkar's translation of *Roopkathar Kelenkari* (as *Scandal in Fairyland*) is a brilliant example of cultural appropriation. But never in the process did the translators inserted or glossed interpretative and suggestive comments on performance of particular scenes or even of a moment. The translations remain close to the Source Texts and therefore, to a person who is unaware of Sircar's process of forming his performance text, they appear quite similar to any other drama that is experimenting with performance space and the body of the actor. But it is the procedure of experimentation that creates the idiom of the Third Theatre, which is not explained or suggested in any of these texts. Hence, under these circumstances, I thought it fit to translate a couple of Third Theatre plays to substantiate practically the translation strategy I thought should be implemented to such texts. I do not wish for a strategy that distorts the linguistic boundaries of the Source Text; rather, it should stick to it purpose of relocating the essence and the words in English, on a literal plane. But what I intend to add to this pre-existing strategyis an interpretative and suggestive section – not within the body of the translated text but in the form of footnotes, as annotative remarks – which, along with addressing the basic cultural specificities of the ST, can interpret a particular excerpt in performative terms, or suggest the performative possibilities of an excerpt to offer the unfamiliar readers of a different culture an insight of the theatricality which these texts bear as their constituent factor. This proposition comes as an extension, a kind of practical implementation of the argument that the Third Theatre, due to the collaborative process through which it develops itself, becomes an open discourse – perpetually fluid and flexible – where

multiple contributory voices can insert their views and keep the discourse alive. The translator of such a text, too, becomes a contributor to the theatrical possibilities of the text(s) s/he is translating. It is true that the translator joins a theatrical discourse only after the formation of a readable, printed play. In case of the Third Theatre, this particular condition holds true, but such is the nature of a Third Theatre text that even a 'complete', readable version does not ideally choke its possibility of developing itself further. The translator's interpretative and suggestive contributions might sound conjectural in the context of a play-text which apparently seems a fixed entity, but in case of the Third Theatre, it must be understood that a text's existence in possibility rather than in fixity defines its nature more clearly. In the plays which I took up for translation – *Beej* and *Khatmat Kring* – I have implemented this strategy by inserting my reading of the texts in terms of performance. The readings, influenced by my awareness of the theatrical apparatus that Sircar used in his development of a particular script, try to improve upon those ideas to understand performance while involving itself in the act of translating.

Therefore, at this point, if I go back to the questions which I intended to address in my research, evidently I see no reason why translation of the Third Theatre texts as a reconstitutive process cannot be considered a feasible proposition.Oscillating between text and performance, the Third Theatre might be approached broadly from two dimensions – performably and textually. Having said this, there is never a chance of complete understanding of this theatre by exclusively treating either of the two. The theatrical idiom of this form is constituted in such a way (as discussed previously) that each of the spheres of text and performance includes the other in it. I have here translation as my instrument – a process that primarily involves a non-transitory scripted text as its beginning point. Unlike a performance whose source can be traced back to the workshops and rehearsals (which are group/ collaborative activities) a scripted text does not generally reveal its source. We receive it as a finished product, assigned to a person as the author, and going by these presences, we come to the conclusion that it reflects one authorial voice and not a group of voices. In such a condition, my task in this project was to confront the apparent fixity of the texts and their structural finality, and subsequently challenge them to find the unscripted, the unsaid, the 'absences' amidst the presences, by referring to the possibilities of which a reconstitutive process might begin. Going by the words of Sircar and his co-workers about the construction of dramatic narratives, and reading into the processes of workshops and rehearsals that were functional in the creation of the alternative idiom to which the Third Theatre conformed, I could trace a pattern within the texts where the there was more to read between the lines than in the lines themselves. These reading are the 'absences', the gaps about which I have mentioned previously, extremely subjective in nature, but nevertheless, are the very unstable points that exist hidden, embedded within the texts only as possibilities, stretching the boundaries of texts, distorting them, breaking them and reconstituting them in terms of one's interpretation of the probable performances. Besides, this need for a reconstitution of the Third Theatre text is not a voluntary act taken up by a translator. The need for a proper understanding of the theatricality of such texts to the readers of a foreign culture is a necessity so far as her/his complete awareness of the text which s/he is reading is concerned; and this can only be achieved by the means of translation, stretching its boundaries beyond its relocative functions to a paradigm where it allows the translator – as has been discussed previously – to insert comments and suggestions to i) anticipate performative changes and developments, and ii) thereby, suggest the basic nature of these texts and the theatre.

However, this immediate aesthetic need for reconstitution was not the only factor that drove me to this project; or to frame it in a different way, if I may, that the constitution of the texts through translation was the immediate but not the only goal that I wanted to achieve. Added to this was a more general and wider concern about the Third Theatre itself – about its practice and future as a theatrical form that was moving into an unfortunate obscurity, due to a sterility it had reached. In the zero decade, the Third Theatre gradually stopped being an innovative theatre practice that had much to offer to the audience; and though, following Sircar's demise, there have been attempts to bring the theatre back in practice, particularly in the cities (as the villages and the suburban spaces have been in a better position than the cities as far as the practice and reception of this theatre is concerned), the ventures, however sincere, have remained in pockets and are yet to take the practice to a platform where a considerable section of the city-based theatre-goers would think it to be a viable alternative to the conventional proscenium stage productions. As of now, this alternative theatrical practice is going on in the city, but it is a far cry from its earlier phase of the seventies, when its wave won the hearts of many, and was considered an equally, if not more, strong theatre as the proscenium, so far as the recognition and impact was concerned. These problems haunted me time and again and I kept searching if there was a way in which I could relate my immediate thesis question to the larger problem: to what extent such translations can contribute to the larger discourse of the Third Theatre in practice?

Translating a Third Theatre text into English comes obviously in the context of a city-based awareness of the art, irrespective of the performative interpretations that I propose the translations should be endowed with. In regional practices, there is no point in translating a Third Theatre play (which can often be extremely regional in essence) into English. The audience or the readers of a particular semi-urban, suburban or rural area would prefer a text written in their vernacular tongue. The reading of English translations comes in the context of the city-based readers, and it is primarily with reference to their understanding of the theatrical aesthetics of the texts that my approach to translation finds a valid ground. The urban mind which is more familiar than the common rural mass with the theatre semiotics, the origin of Sircar's ideas, may be found more keen to study not only the literal translation but the theatrical idiom that the texts carry as interpretations – to locate the texts aesthetically on performative grounds, beside appreciating their literary values. Thus my translation strategy, as a reconstitutive process, does not exclusively study the content or the form, but intends to read one in relation to the other, and suggest the points where such scopes of reading may rise. It is the appreciation of both the issues and the aesthetics that can locate the Third Theatre in its entirety, thus, focusing on its uniqueness and necessity. I believe that a translation strategy such as this, when it reaches the readers of a different culture who are not familiar with Sircar's Third Theatrical aesthetics, might be able to help them understanding the uniqueness of the theatre and further nourish their interest in the movement and its prospects at the present time. A gradual increase in readership, the revival of awareness of the theatrical idiom of the Third Theatre not only on part of the Bengalis but of the enthusiasts from other cities as well might just be able to accelerate the process of regaining the lost power and recognition for the Third Theatre. My project finds its place in this intention only.

Select Bibliography

Primary Sources:

Sircar, Badal. *Three Plays.*Trans. Samik Bandopadhyay, and Badal Sircar. Kolkata: Seagull Books, 2005. Print.
---. *Natak Samagra.* 3 vols. Kolkata: Mitra & Ghosh, 2011. Print.

Secondary Sources:

Basnett, Susan. *Translation Studies.* 1980. USA: Routledge, 2002. Print.
---. "Translating for the Theatre: A Case Against Performability". *Traduction, Terminologie, Redaction* 4.1(1991): 99-111. Print.
Grotowski, Jerzy. *Towards a Poor Theatre.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968. Print.
Pavis, Patrice. *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture.* Canada, London, USA: Routledge, 1992. Print.
Pirandello, Luigi. "Illustrators, Actors and Translators". 1908. Trans. Susan Basnett, *Luigi Pirandello in the Theatre: A Documentary Record.* Eds. Susan Basnett, and Jennifer Lorch. Toronto: Harwood Academic Publisher,1993. 23-34. Print.
"Kolkatay Aar Natak Korben Na Badal Sircar" *Jugantar* 22 Sept. 1986: 7. Print.
Sircar, Badal. *On Theatre.* Trans. Samik Bandopadhyay. Kolkata: Seagull Books, 2009. Print.
---. Interview. *News Time* 17 Oct. 1986, late ed.: 16. Print.
---. Interview. *Angan* 1.4 (1987): 24-36. Print.